

## Country Studies--Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos

### Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

### Be aware of the following

- Theravada Buddhist practice in the area
- Similarities of major ethnic minorities within the theater
- Limiting nature of the word "animist"
- Continued Hindu impact of religious thought and practice
- Impact of Communist government on Laotian Buddhist practice

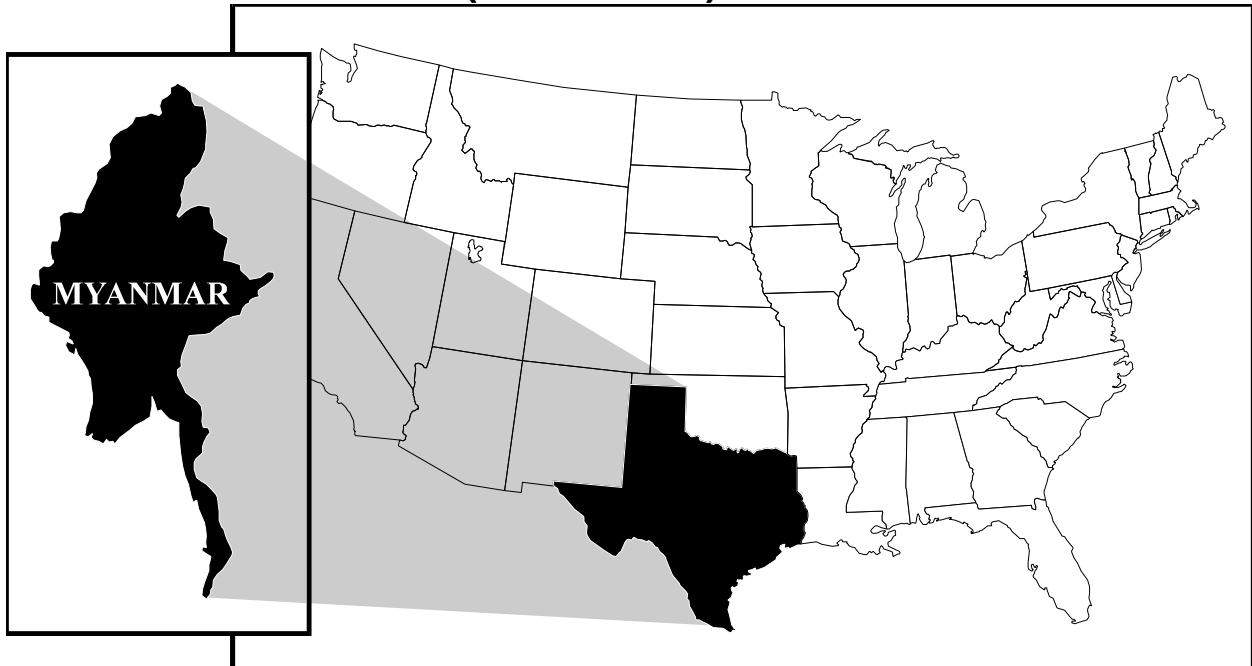
### Identify

- Nonattachment, merit, demerit
- Anade, Karen
- U Thant, Aung San Suu Kyi
- Bonze, Bhikkhu
- Genocide Day, Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge
- Temple of Angkor
- Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Wat
- Lao People's Democratic Republic
- Shaman, Hmong

### Realize

- Place of giving (merit) to Buddhist causes in Burma
- Respect given monks in Theravada Buddhism
- Traditionally high status enjoyed by women in Burmese and Cambodian society
- Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia
- Extent of disabled people in Cambodia
- Hindu/Buddhist influence on Cambodian art and architecture
- Prevalence of spirit world in Laotian, Burmese and Cambodian religious practice

## Myanmar (Burma) (MIHN-mahr)



<u>Population</u>	45,103,809
% under 15 years	37%
<u>Commo</u>	
TV	1:45
Radio	1:14
Phone	1:501
Newspaper	no figure
<u>Health</u>	
Life Expectancy	Male 58 Female 63
Hospitals	1:1,586
Doctors	1:3,306
IMR	62:1,000
<u>Income</u>	\$950.00 per cap
<u>Literacy Rate</u>	78%

## 1. Religious Groups

### a. Buddhist 89%

(1) Theravada Buddhism *"In strict orthodox Theravada Buddhism, Gotama was merely a human being; he does not exist anywhere to hear people's prayers. His words are left in the sacred books and can be learned from his 'sons,' the living Theravada monks, who exist today as the Buddha once instructed the first monks to live. All Burmans share in this heritage and follow some semblance of the strict orthodox teachings. The Buddhism of the Pali scriptures, however, often differs from actual religious beliefs and practices in modern Burma."* (Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are from the Library of Congress Country Studies/Area Handbook--Burma [Myanmar])



(2) Nonattachment *"In terms of each persons' daily plan and lifelong ambition, a major quest is for nonattachment to the sensate world, which everyone must quit eventually."*

*In the early ears and in the flush of adulthood, attachments to kin, sensate pleasures, career, society, and self are seen as naturally strong; nonetheless, one should try to lessen the bonds. Rational thought should conclude in harmony with the Buddha's teachings that the stronger the attachment, the worse the eventual suffering when all must be released at the end.*

*Each person will vary tremendously in the ability to control desire, and human weaknesses undermine many sincere efforts. For example, because the Buddha condemned alcohol as a substance that prevented rational thought, Buddhists try not to drink alcohol, but some lack the will to avoid it, though they usually are the first to explain that they are wrong to indulge. The more sensate pleasure a person can deny, the more Burman Buddhists honor that person. Slaves to attachments, however, are merely normal humans, not sinners."*

### (3) Rebirth, Giving, Merit, and Demerit

*"Burmans believe that the best way to ensure a better future life is to give as generously as possible to Buddhism rather than to secular charities or causes. Buddhist giving is noted in golden books kept by heavenly beings and is called 'merit.'*

*The more merit earned, the better the rebirth. The more one has, the more one should give, but intent is very important, and a simple flower from a sincere poor farmer is said to earn more merit than a disdainful cash donation by a rich merchant. Merit is usually shared or can be entirely transferred. When a boy enters a monastery for the first time, he traditionally transfers the merit he earns to his mother. It is customary to share merit with all beings in this world, in hell or in heaven.*



*Each person, poor or rich, sick or healthy, intelligent or otherwise, is the product of whatever merit or lack of it was earned in previous lives. Each is, in a sense, spending in this life the fruits of merit earned previously. There is no one to blame if this life is difficult; each deserves what was earned before.*

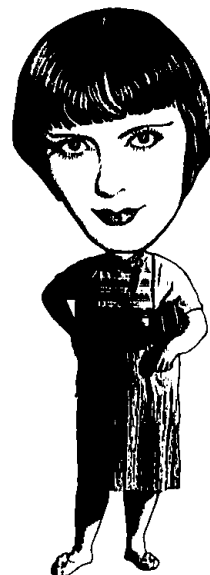
*Others will feel compassion for another's suffering, but ultimately each is responsible for one's own fate. Under such a system, riches are one's just reward; poverty, conversely, is the just consequence of what is called demerit.*

*Demerit is recorded on dog-skin books by supernatural beings, and the record may include the killing of a mosquito as it bit, a drinking party, or perhaps adultery. The standard five precepts include not lying, not taking intoxicants (including alcohol and narcotics but not tobacco or coffee), not committing adultery (some exclude males who use prostitutes) not killing any creature, and not stealing.*

*The orthodox maintain that each demeritorious act must be paid for first in one of the eight hells before moving on to one of the heavens to delight in the rewards for the worthy, but others lull themselves into believing that demerit can be reduced by application of merit earned or transferred. The human wish to use an accounting system explains the sudden, conspicuous religiosity of some notoriously wicked individuals in Burma."*

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**(4) Meditation and truth** "One way of seeking nirvana is through an inward exploration of consciousness known as meditation, which helps to confirm the belief that what is conveniently conceived of as self or person is actually a coalition of parts creating the illusion of existence. Burmans follow particularly a form of introspection and insight that stresses components of consciousness, such as breathing. Some monks specialize in this search for ultimate truths, and in modern times lay persons join centers that teach the arts of meditation in peaceful settings.



Burmans in meditation seek not only Buddhist paths to truth but also the benefits of mental and physical health that accrue from the process, for tensions are reduced at many levels.

Buddhists also believe that in the process of discovering inner truths through meditation, a person, particularly a monk, gains supranormal power, such as the ability to see and hear things far away or the power to travel in air. A monk must not claim such powers, nor is he to use them, but his lay followers may let it be known that indeed he has them, and many stories are told of remarkable disclosures made by meditating monks about matters that Western science cannot explain.

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*Burmans will often deny to outsiders that they believe in psychic or magical phenomena, but many, if they meet with an understanding listener, will be quite willing to explain how supranormal powers are manifest."*

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**(5) Prophecy and hope** "In Burma some hill Karens and many Burmans share hopes that someday a leader will come to prepare the world for the next Buddha. The last Buddha lived 2500 years ago, and life is believed to become worse as more and more people forget the last Buddha's teachings. Life will deteriorate further, so the prophecy goes, and then a charismatic king will come to Burma (or to the Karens if they express the hope), and under his reign there will be a paradise on earth in which the next Buddha will preach, and all who hear him will be assured of nirvana."

**(6) Spiritual power as national treasure** "The village pagoda may be much smaller and the monastery inhabited by one or only a few adult monks, but the meaning and importance are the same.

With much effort and pride, the teachings of the Buddha are honored not because he was a god but because he was a deeply respected, very wise human being. The more one donates to Buddhism, the more one demonstrates that respect, and the more others in the society respect the donor.



No matter what the standard of living may be in Burma in comparison with other countries, the society never fails to give generously to its religion. The thousands of ancient pagodas around the countryside built in honor of the Buddha's memory are never torn down for a hotel site or building materials. They remain as testimony to the spirit of Buddhist giving, as do the massive buildings at Pagan. Such is the Burmans' national treasure, preserved and honored through the ages."

**(7) Men of prowess** "Leaders, therefore, are watched carefully for merit balance indications. Neither king nor military hero is expected to be able to defeat the law of impermanence. Those who rule by force, especially through war, are amassing great quantities of demerit, but their success is nevertheless heralded as proof of a previous good life. Kings, the rebel Saya San, the martyred general

Aung San, and General Ne Win are examples of men who clearly had a massive merit balance. Such secular men of prowess are also expected to continue to work on their cosmic merit balance by giving to Buddhism at some point."

**(8) Social status (monks)** "In any Theravada society, the highest deference is given to Buddhist monks; even a mother bows deeply to her young son, who may be just a novice in the order, for in his orange robe he has become a living symbol of the Buddha. One's head must be kept below that of a monk. Upon entering a monastery, one bows three times deeply to the statue of the Buddha, then to the presiding monk. When leaving, one bows to the monk first and then to the image. The highest ranking military officer or politician in the country must so behave, for monks are even more respected than kings. In Thailand, for example, the king ritually bows to his head monk.

If a monk is especially revered by the people because of his nonattachment and character, women, to show their respect, may bow in the street so that he walks on a 'carpet' of their hair. Respect often involves an emotional feeling akin to love. Monks so revered may be honored with gifts, which they are too nonattached to use, thus inspiring still further gifts, which are usually given to the needy.



Because anyone who is mentally and physically sound and who is not a fugitive from legal responsibilities may join the sangha, any male may become one of the most highly respected members of Burman society. Consequently, the sangha becomes a vital ingredient in social mobility. Because monks move about the country seeking new teachers, a country boy from a poor home has the same basic options as does his opposite."

**b. Hinduism** A "substantial number of adherents."

**c. Islam** Primarily found within the Rakhine State.

**d. Christian** Many Chins, Kachins, Karens and others (see below).

## 2. Ethnic/Racial Groups

### a. Ethnic Burmans 68%

**b. Shans** (shahns) 9% *"Once the masters of the Burmans when they ruled after the collapse of the Pagan-based monarchy, the Shans have no historical inferiority complex. In the centuries after the Pagan period, the Shans developed their own monarchies where Shan mandalas of power oscillated constantly as more powerful Burmese and Thai kings contested each other. Deference to outside royalty was a small price to pay for considerable Shan independence internally."*



*The Shans in 1983 were basically rice farmers, skillful traders, and a valley people. In matters of governance, historically they have allowed an aristocratic elite to rule them."*

### c. Rakhine 4%

### d. Karen 7%

*"It has been fashionable to call the traditional religion of people like the Karens a form of animism, or 'spirit worship.' The word never does justice to such beliefs, which may be as complex and lofty as those of the major religions of the world. Traditional Karens, like so many other peoples, believe that both matter and spirit are realities, each possibly inhabiting the same entity at a given time or perhaps later separated but still linked. There are Karen gods, rituals, and oral religious traditions so impressive that early missionaries toyed with the belief that the Karens were a lost tribe of Israel."*

*No matter where Karens live, they characteristically have a strong sense of ethnic pride."*



**e. Kachin**   *"Of all the minorities in Burma, the Kachins have the greatest reputation for resorting to arms to assert what they believe are their rights."*

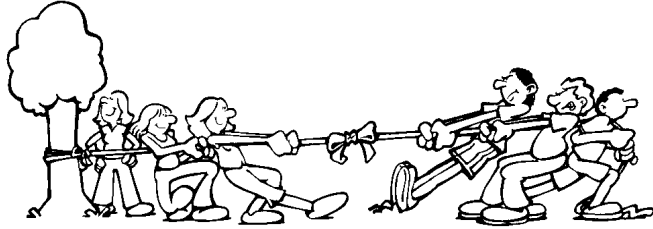


*The traditional Kachin religion is deeply related to their intimacy with the mountains and a combination of their hunting concepts and hill agriculture. The religion also provides a symbolic explanation of their complex kin, marriage, and feasting systems in which those who aspire to the most status have to validate themselves by giving elaborate feasts at which wealth is redistributed for increased prestige."*

**f. Chin**   (JIN) *"Turbulent, competitive, legalistic, and yet very social, the Chins did not take to Christianity as well as did the Karens. Like the Karens, those who are Christians (possibly one-quarter of the population) have hoped to use their new faith to link with outside powers to protect their people from being engulfed by Burmans. Chin religion, in which the door to paradise is opened by hinting done in the proper way to honor and contend with the spirits of what is killed, can be seen in contrast to the Buddhism of their neighbors, where taking life is normatively scorned. Animal sacrifice, so common among hill peoples, is likewise condemned by valley Buddhists."*

**g. Chinese, Indians, and other minorities**   *"The historically porous border between Burma and Bangladesh and India has been the source of perpetual movement of Muslims back and forth in response to their various political fortunes. Although the potential was always there for Buddhist-Muslim confrontation, in general the two groups have managed to live peaceably side by side but without much interaction."*

### 3. Gender Issues



**a. Domestic violence** "Violence against women, including spousal abuse, is infrequent. Married couples often do not live by themselves but rather in households with extended families, where social pressure tends to protect the wife from abuse." (Unless stated otherwise, quotations which follow come from the Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996--Myanmar, U.S. Department of State)

**b. Prostitution** "Trafficking in women and girls remains a serious problem. There were reliable reports that many women and children in border areas, where the Government's control is limited, were forced or lured into working as prostitutes in Thailand. It is unknown how many young women have been deceived into working as prostitutes, but a common practice is to lure young women to Thailand with promises of employment as a waitress or domestic servant (see country report for Thailand). In addition, the military forces continued to impress women for military portage duties, and there were many reports of rape of ethnic minority women by soldiers."

**c. Equality** "In general women have traditionally enjoyed a high status, exercising most of the same basic rights as men and taking an active role in business. Consistent with traditional culture, they keep their own names after marriage and often control family finances."

However, women remained underrepresented in most traditionally male occupations, and a few professions continued to be entirely barred to women. The burden of poverty, which is particularly widespread in rural areas, fell disproportionately on women."



#### 4. Conflicts    No international disputes

**5. Holidays and Festivals** (The following material, adapted from Holidays, Festivals and Celebrations of the World Dictionary, compiled by Sue Thompson and Barbara Carlson, [Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1994], is instructive.)

##### a. Watering the Banyan Tree (Apr/May)

- Most important of the twelve Burmese festivals
- Kasone (Full Moon Day  $\frac{3}{4}$  sometimes known as Buddha Day) celebrates birth and enlightenment of the Buddha at the foot of the Banyan tree.
- Buddhists gather at monasteries and precept halls to practice meditation, to make charitable donations, and to observe the precepts of Buddhism.
- Pouring of water celebrates the preservation of the Banyan tree.
- Sometimes fish are transferred during the hot month of celebration, from streams, ponds, and tanks to places where there is more water.

##### b. Tazaungdaing (October-November)

- Pre-Buddhist festival. Honors God of Lights, an awakening of the Hindu God Vishnu from his long sleep.
- Buddhism sees date as night that Siddhartha's mother wove traditional yellow robes for him.
- Some commemorate return of Gautama Buddha from visit to his mother's reincarnated spirit. Monks light candles to illuminate his path to earth.



##### c. Thingyan (9-12 April)

- Three-day feast of the New Year known as the Water Festival
- Pots of water are offered to monks to wash or sprinkle images of Buddha.

- On the final day, birds and fish are set free, and young people wash the hair of their elders.
- Water-splashing custom originated with the idea that bad luck and sins of the old year were washed away.

**d. Waso** (June/July-September/October)

- Festival of Lights. Homes are lit with paper lanterns, all-night weaving contests take place.
- Young unmarried women weave robes, and at dawn offer them to images of the Buddha at the pagoda.

## 6. Customs

**a. Anade** (an-ah-deh) *"Accompanying the traditional system has always been an aspect of the Burman mentality for which there is no adequate English term. The behavior pattern or emotion is called anade by Burmans."*



*Rather than suffer a direct affront or embarrassment, Burmese prefer to withdraw or avoid a situation entirely. Rather than cause such a feeling in another, a Burman may completely avoid an encounter. Among good friends or family, expected behavior is that a person will never bring up matters that would bring shame or reduction of status to another.*

*The concept of anade is so broad that it can also refer to reluctance to enter a relationship that creates a debt one does not wish to have. Thus, offered kindness can be rejected by a person not willing to reciprocate. If anade is pleaded as an excuse for inaction, others are always expected to honor it.*

*Most importantly, anade implies a superior-inferior relationship that does not harmonize well with democratic*

social machinery. To vote down a minority in a committee is not allowing for any face-saving, whereas in a hierarchical order the person in the inferior position is not necessarily made to feel inferior. Knowing where one stands, one can avoid demeaning confrontations with authority, but if everyone is made equal and forced to interact through committee structure, then individuals will publicly risk embarrassment if they lose. Representative government becomes a dangerous business where the traditional harmony of anade observance contends with the conflicting demands of constituents. For these reasons a 'committee' of monks or party members seldom resembles democracy or socialism in action but more likely a dutiful group of followers doing what their leader expects them to do.

Keeping the appearance of harmony is an important goal that anade serves, and debate is neither encouraged in the typical education process nor common in public life. Politeness is to be maintained by avoiding direct expression of disagreement." (Country Study)



**b. Cultural uniqueness** "When Western nations proudly acclaim some new achievement, the Burmans often point out that they have been doing the same thing for centuries.

A case in point involves the Western women's liberation movement. Burman women have always been powerful. By remaining close to their mother, female relatives, and daughters, they always have a strong support team. Equal inheritance of land and wealth with brothers gives them financial power, which is often enhanced by their managing family finances or carrying on a business. Although Buddhism assigns superiority to males, the powerful female is quite often aware that the superiority is a token that men seem to need for self-esteem. As one very successful Burman lady explained, 'Let him go first. That is where the snakes are.'

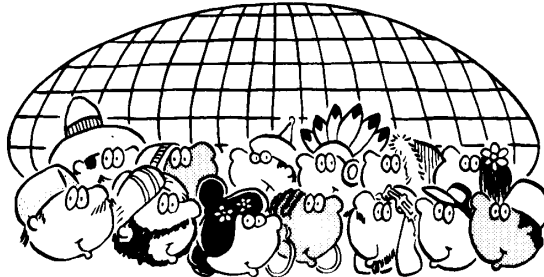
When a woman wished to divorce a man, the proverbial story was that she put his things outside the house for him to see when he came home. By feeding the monks, women were

*their real supporters and thus have always had much social influence and power. Although seldom given as much formal education as a man, they predominate in chanting Pali responses on holy days because they often have formed their own study groups. They may treat their husbands with the greatest deference, keeping their heads below their husband's, walking behind them, eating after males have finished, or following other ancient customs, but they are in actuality still very dignified and formidable beings.*

*A man may strut as he plays his part on a stage that makes him superior, but the woman is so powerful she needs no theatrics. Some women who have been educated abroad may feel that some improvements in their status should be made, but most are proud and satisfied to be what they are."*



**c. National/racial/ethnic minorities** "Since only people who can prove long familial links to Burma are accorded full citizenship, ethnic populations such as Muslims, Indians, and Chinese, continued to be denied full citizenship and to be excluded from government positions. People without full citizenship are not free to travel domestically and are barred from certain advanced university programs in medicine and technological fields. Anti-Chinese and anti-Muslim sentiment remained pervasive."



*"Minorities in Burma face a Buddhist majority, and Christianity remains an option for asserting one's*

distinctness, not only for the Karens or Chins, for example, but also for those who have had a genuine Christian conversion and for others who retain a fierce loyalty to all things British. On a visit to Mandalay, a visitor attempting, however ineptly, to speak Burmese should not be surprised to have an impeccably dressed older man watch for a while with a smile and then speak in exquisite English with a perfect Oxford accent. The same elderly gentleman will finish his days as an ardent Christian. No revolution will convert him into either a Buddhist or a socialist.

Mosques are found in Arakan, Rangoon, and in all areas where the Muslim community is strong, some of these groups having established themselves in Burma centuries ago. Like the Hindu and Chinese populations, Muslims have to keep a low profile in terms of asserting their ethnic identity in order to avoid the racial antagonism that has often flared up in the past." (Human Rights Report...)

**d. Freedom of religion** "Adherents of all religions that were duly registered with the authorities generally enjoyed freedom to worship as they chose, although Buddhists continued to enjoy a privileged position. In recent years, the Government made special efforts to link itself with Buddhism as a means of asserting its own popular legitimacy.

The Muslim and Christian religious minorities continued to be regarded with suspicion by authorities. Moreover, there is a concentration of Christians among the particular ethnic minorities against whom the army has fought for decades. Religious publications, like secular ones, remained subject to control and censorship. Christian bibles translated into indigenous languages could not legally be imported or printed. It remained extremely difficult for Christian and Muslim groups to obtain permission to build new churches and mosques."



**e. People with disabilities** *"Official assistance to persons with disabilities is extremely limited."*

**7. Cultural Literacy Concepts/Terms** The following terms, adapted from The Dictionary of Global Culture, (edited by Kwame Appiah and Henry Gates, Jr., NY: Alfred Knopf, 1997), apply to Myanmar. Consult this helpful dictionary for further information.

**a. Aung San Suu Kyi** (oung-sahn-soo-chee)

- Key opposition leader to Burmese military rule
- Awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 1991
- Held under house arrest from 20 Jul 1989 to 10 July 1995

**b. Kachin**

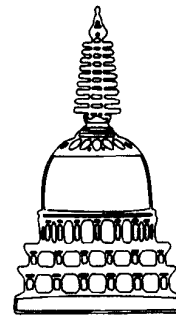
- Ethnic group located in Northeast Burma, living under a system called Gummtsa. A chief owns all the land, his people pay tribute.
- The Kachin have never been subjugated by any of the local empires.

**c. Karen**

- Collective of ethnic groups living in southern and eastern parts of Burma.
- Pro-British with over 30% converting to Christianity
- Resisted annexation to Burma and today still protest.

**d. Kyanzittha** (c.1084-1113)

- Burmese king who set tradition of kings being chosen for ability rather than divine right.
- Strong patron for the arts and supporter of Buddhism.
- Built the Ananda Temple, the oldest structure remaining in Pagan.





**e. Pagan** (pah-GAHN)

- Ancient Burmese city founded in the mid-ninth century.
- King Anawrahta expanded the city into an empire by conquering the Mons in Southern Burma.
- Anawrahta introduced Theravada Buddhism while allowing Mon art and architecture to remain.
- Mongol Empire under Kublai Khan conquered the Pagans in 1287 with aid from the Shans in the North.

**f. Pyu**

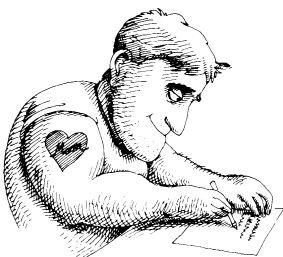
- People who formed the earliest known civilization in Burma. City-states were first discovered in the 1960s and 1970s.
- History dates as far back as 200 B.C.E. until invasions in the early ninth century.

**g. Shan** (shahn)

- Ethnic group native to eastern and northern Burma. Ruled parts of central and southern Burma from 1299-1555.
- Best known for its patronage of Burmese literature.
- Shan states annexed by Britain in 1886

**h. Thant, U** (tahnt, 1909-1974)

- Third secretary-general of the United Nations from 1962-1972.
- Wrote *Cities and Their Stories* (1930); *Towards a New Education* (1946); and his essays *Toward World Peace* (1964) and *View from the United Nations* (1978).



## 8. Resources for Further Study

### a. Cross-Cultural Resources

Cummings, Joe and Tony Wheeler. Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit--Myanmar. Berkeley, Calif.: Lonely Planet, 1993. AISO--Bur 915.91-/-045 C971

The best series, by far, of readily accessible travel guides. Don't leave for Myanmar without this text.

Klein, Wilhelm. Insight Guides--Myanmar Burma. Singapore: APA Publications, 1992. AISO--BUR 915.91045 K641

Part of the aesthetically pleasing and helpful Insight series. Beautiful photographs, in National Geographic manner, make this a helpful text.

Yin, Saw Myat. Culture Shock! Burma. Portland, Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 1994.

Beg, borrow, or purchase books in this series. Highly recommended by the Overseas Briefing Center, U.S. Department of State.

### b. Biography, novels, literature, poetry



Aung, Maung Htin. Burmese Folktales. London: Geoffrey Cumberlege: Oxford University Press, 1954.

P Aiso Library: Burma BUR 398.209-/-591 A926 1954

Seventy Burmese folktales arranged in four sections: animal, romantic, wonder, and humorous tales. In his introduction the author describes the original sources of the tales, the background of Burmese folktales and their place in Burmese literature.

Aung-Thwin, Michael. Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, c1985.

► Bosun Library: General DS529.2 .A86 1985

Describes the layout, institutions, and economy of the Burmese city/state. Ends with a section on the significance of Pagan in Southeast Asian history and growth.

Ba U, U. My Burma: The Autobiography of a President. Taplinger Publishing Co., 1959.

► Bosun Library: General DS528.5 .B2

The first Burmese President writes on his parents, childhood, education, careers as a lawyer and judge, Japanese Occupation, and Burmese independence. Written in a clear voice which tries to be objective in the face of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "might is right" ideology in subjugation of foreign nations and peoples.

Gordon, Ernst. Through the Valley of the Kwai. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

Account of the spiritual triumph and Christian renaissance which took place in a World War II POW death camp. Ernst Gordon is the chaplain emeritus of Princeton University Chapel.

Scott, James George, Sir. The Burman: His Life and Notions. New York: Norton, [1963].

► Bosun Library: General DS527.9 .S4

Written by a British civil servant who spent over thirty years in Burma in 1882. A wonderfully bright and human book which covers childbirth rites, astrologers in Burmese society, and Buddhism.

Thant, U. Toward World Peace; Addresses and Public Statements, 1957-1963. New York: T. Yoseloff, [1964].

► Bosun Library: General D843.T3

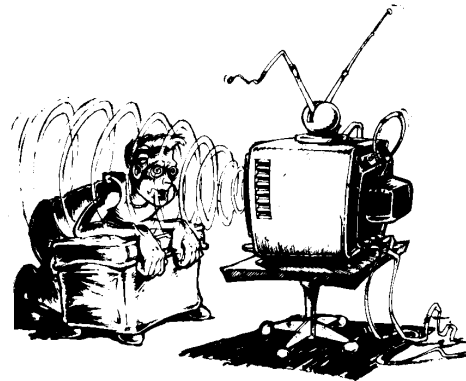
Well-documented speeches of U Thant that are separated into topics such as science and technology, education, peace, crises, and East/West relations. Includes a solemn memorial statement to John F. Kennedy.

Thant, U. View From the United Nations. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978.

► Bosun Library: General CT20.H2 T36

Memoirs of Thant's 10 years as secretary general for the United Nations during the turbulent sixties. Thant was a strong advocate for world peace; dedicating his book to "all who strive for peace, justice, and progress."

### c. News articles



"Burmese Rebels Blamed for 2 Temple Blasts." New York Times, 26 Dec. 1996.

Bombings at the cave holding a sacred relic of the Buddha, one of two teeth that have survived since his death 2,500 years ago.

"Burmese Stepping Up Security After Buddhist Raid on Mosque." New York Times, 23 Mar 1996.

"Buddhist monks went on a rampage, attacking several mosques and starting street protests (in Mandalay) after reports that a Buddhist girl had been raped by a Muslim man."

Erlanger, Steven. "Clinton Approves New U.S. Sanctions Against Burmese." New York Times, 22 Apr 1997, p. A1.

"Human Rights At Issue...Ban Will Apply Only to Future Investments by American Companies in Myanmar."

Mydans, Seth. "Burmese Regime Wins Role in Southeast Asian Bloc." New York Times, 1 Jun 1997.

ASEAN announces that it will embrace Myanmar as a member this year, overriding American concerns for human rights.

Mydans, Seth. "Burmese Sanctions Get Little Backing in Asia." New York Times, 25 Apr 1997, p. A5.

ASEAN is "intent on welcoming Myanmar as a member this year...regional leaders in recent years praise the idea of 'Asian values,' in which group welfare takes precedence over individual rights. It is a bottom-line philosophy that suggests, in effect, that if everybody can do business and get richer, everyone will be better off. Issues like child labor, environmental protection and individual liberties must take second place."

Myers, Steven Lee. "Trade vs. Rights: A U.S. Debate With a Burmese Focus." New York Times, 4 Mar 1997.

Debate over whether further application of sanctions against Myanmar is necessary.

Salpukas, Agis. "Foreign Energy, Domestic Politics: Burmese Project Tests Unocal Resolve." New York Times, 23 May 1997, p. C1.

Problems encountered by Unocal in laying a natural gas pipeline off the coast of Myanmar to Ratchaburi, Thailand, some 416 miles away. Plans call for completion in Jul 1998.

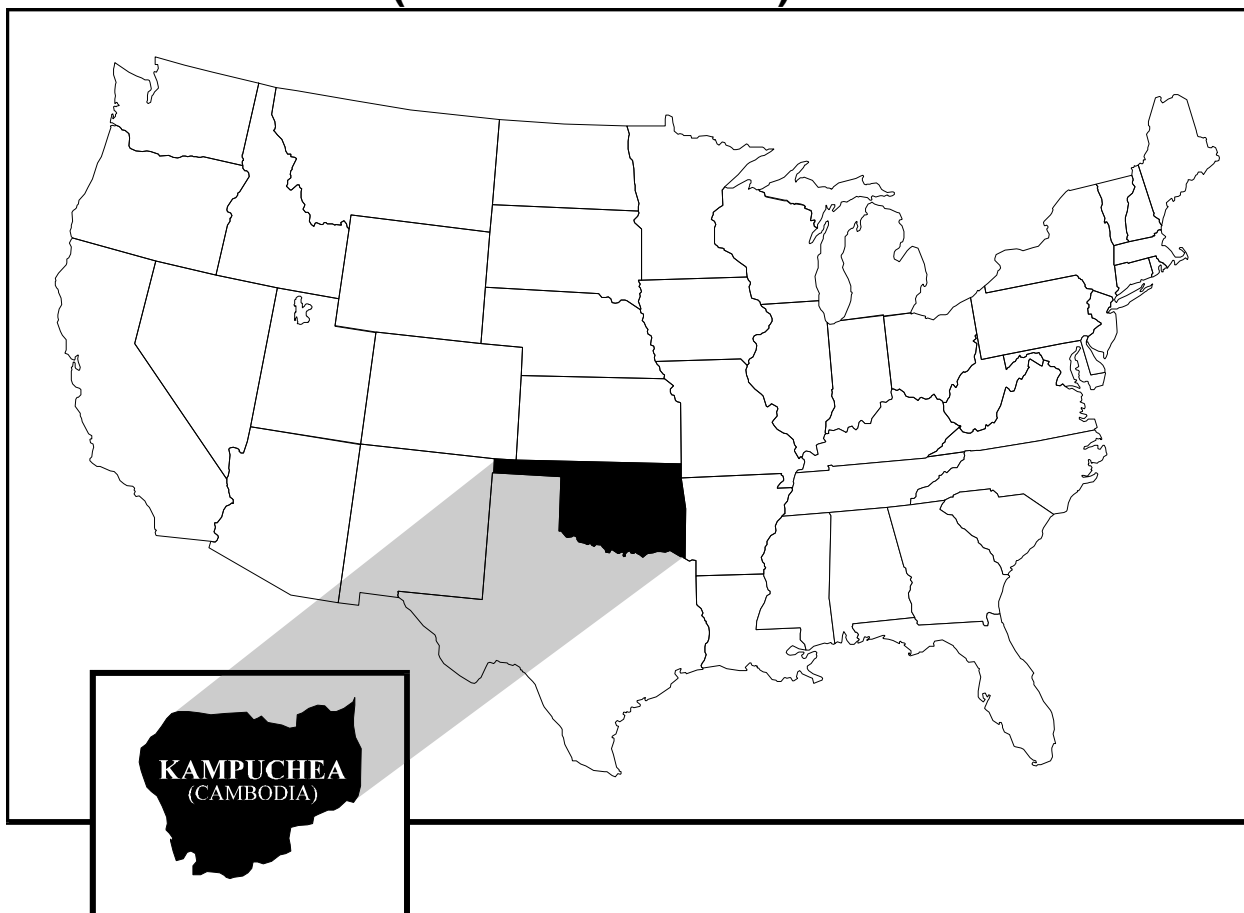
Swerdlow, Joel. "Burma, the Richest of Poor Countries." National Geographic, Jul 1995, p. 70.



"Stay focused."

## Cambodia

(kahm-BOH-dee-ah)



Kampuchea (kahm-poo-JHEE-ah) A term for ethnic Cambodians used by Communists to identify the whole country.

<u>Population</u>	10,561,373
% under 15 years	45%
<u>Commo</u>	
TV	1:133
Radio	1:9
Phone	1:1,600
Newspaper	no figure
<u>Health</u>	
Life Expectancy	Male 48/Female 51
Hospitals	1:632
Doctors	1:14,300
IMR	110:1,000
<u>Income</u>	\$600.00 per cap
<u>Literacy Rate</u>	74%

## 1. Religious Groups

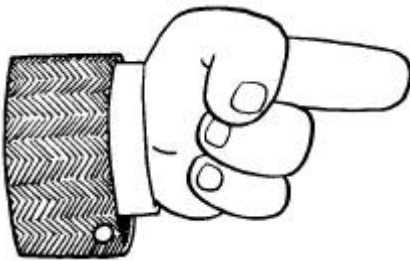
### a. Theravada Buddhist 95%

**(1) Hindu/Buddhist origins** "Buddhism began as a reaction to Hindu doctrines and as an effort to reform them. Nevertheless, the two faiths share many basic assumptions. Both view the universe and all life therein as parts of a cycle of eternal flux. In each religion, the present life of an individual is a phase in an endless chain of events. Life and death are merely alternate aspects of individual existence marked by the transition points of birth and death. An individual is thus continually reborn, perhaps in human form, perhaps in some non-human form, depending upon his or her actions in the previous life.

The endless cycle of rebirth is known as samsara (wheel of life). Theravada Buddhism is a tolerant, non prescriptive religion that does not require belief in a supreme being. Its precepts require that each individual take full responsibility for his own actions and omissions."

(Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are from the Library of Congress Country Studies/Area Handbooks--Cambodia)

**(2) Monks Bonzes (BUHZ)** are Cambodian novice monks. A fully ordained bonze is a **Bhikkhu**. "It is possible to become a novice at as young an age as seven, but in practice thirteen is the earliest age for novices.



A bhikkhu must be at least twenty. The monk's life is regulated by Buddhist law, and life in the wat adheres to a rigid routine. A bhikkhu follows 227 rules of monastic discipline as well as the 10 basic precepts. These include the five precepts that all Buddhists should follow.

Women are not ordained, but older women, especially widows, can become nuns. They live in the wat and play an



important role in the everyday life of the temple. Nuns shave their heads and eyebrows and generally follow the same precepts as monks. They may prepare the altars and do some of the housekeeping."

### **(3) Khmer Rouge Persecution** (kah-MAY ROOZH)

"Anticlerical feelings reached their highest point among the Khmer Rouge, who at first attempted to indoctrinate monks and to force them to pass anticlerical ideas on to the laity. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, monks were expelled forcibly from the wats and were compelled to do manual labor. Article 20 of the 1976 Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea permitted freedom of religion but banned all reactionary religions, that were 'detrimental to the country.' The minister of culture stated that Buddhism was incompatible with the revolution and was an instrument of exploitation.



Under this regime, to quote the Finnish Inquiry Commission, 'The practice of religion was forbidden and the pagodas were systematically destroyed.' Observers estimated that 50,000 monks died during the Khmer Rouge regime. The status of Buddhism and of religion in general after the Vietnamese invasion was at least partially similar to its status in pre-Khmer Rouge times."

**b. Indigenous belief** "Highland tribal groups, most with their own local religious systems, probably number fewer than 100,000 persons. The Khmer Loeu have been loosely described as animists, but most tribal groups have their own pantheon of local spirits.

In general they see their world filled with various invisible spirits (often called yang [zahng]), some benevolent, others malevolent. They associate spirits with rice, soil, water, fire, stones, paths, and so forth. Sorcerers or specialists in each village contact these spirits and prescribe ways to appease them.

*In times of crisis or change, animal sacrifices may be made to placate the anger of the spirits. Illness is often believed to be caused by evil spirits or sorcerers. Some tribes have special medicine men or shamans who treat the sick. In addition to belief in spirits, villagers believe in taboos on many objects or practices. Among the Khmer Loeu, the Rade and Jarai groups have a well developed hierarchy of well-developed spirits with a supreme ruler at its head."*

**c. Christianity** *"Christianity, introduced into Cambodia by Roman Catholic missionaries in 1660, made little headway, at least among the Buddhists. In 1972 there were probably about 20,000 Christians in Cambodia, most of whom were Roman Catholics."*

**d. Islam** *"Islam is the religion of the Cham (jahm--also called Khmer Islam) and Malay minorities. According to Po Dharma, there were 150,000 to 200,000 Muslims in Cambodia as late as 1975. Persecution under the Khmer Rouge eroded their numbers, however, and by the late 1980s they probably had not regained their former strength. All of the Cham Muslims are Sunnis of the Shafii school. Po Dharma divides the Muslim Cham in Cambodia into a traditionalist branch and an orthodox branch.*

*The traditional Cham retain many ancient Muslim or pre-Muslim traditions and rites. They consider Allah as the all-powerful God, but they also recognize other non-Islamic deities."*

## 2. Ethnic/Racial Groups

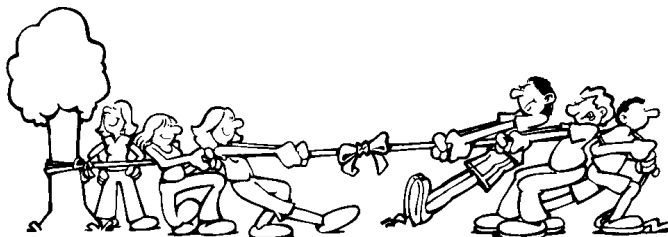
**a. Cambodian** 90%

**b. Chinese** 5%

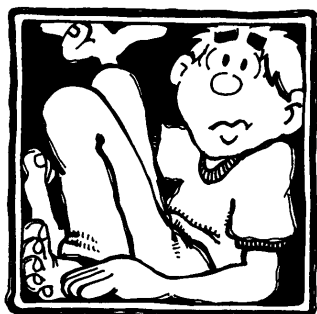
**c. Vietnamese** 5%

**d. Hill tribes, Chams and Burmese** (small numbers)

### 3. Gender Issues



**a. Domestic violence** *"International and Cambodian NGO workers report that violence against women, including rape and domestic violence, is common. There were reports of rape, but there were no statistics available on this problem. A study by an international NGO released in July estimates that one in six wives is physically abused by her husband, and half of those are injured."*



*Authorities normally decline to become involved in domestic disputes. There are some indications that stress and other psychological problems originating during the Khmer Rouge period of the 1970's contribute to the problem of violence against women."*

(Unless stated otherwise, quotations which follow come from the Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996--Cambodia, U.S. Department of State.)

**b. Prostitution** *"NGO's reported that prostitution and trafficking in women were serious problems. The Government passed a law against prostitution and trafficking in January, but human rights groups indicate that it is not adequately enforced."*

**c. Equality** *"According to an international labor NGO's report, women now comprise 55 percent of the population, but 60 percent of agricultural workers, 85 percent of the business workforce, 70 percent of the industrial workforce, and 60 percent of all service sector workers. Women are often concentrated in low-paying jobs in these sectors and are largely excluded from management positions, which remain dominated by men."*

*The Constitution contains explicit language providing for equal rights for women, equal pay for equal work, and equal status in marriage.*

*In practice, women have equal property rights with men, have the same status in bringing divorce proceedings, and have equal access to education and some jobs. However, cultural traditions continued to limit women's ability to reach senior positions in government, business, and other areas."*



## 4. Conflicts

**a. International disputes** *"Offshore islands and sections of the boundary with Vietnam are in dispute; maritime boundary with Vietnam not defined; parts of border with Thailand in dispute; maritime boundary with Thailand not clearly defined."* (CIA Factbook--1996)

**b. Terrorism** *The Party of Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge) "Now engaged in low-level insurgency against the Cambodian Government. Although its victims are mainly Cambodian villagers, the Khmer Rouge has occasionally kidnapped and killed foreigners traveling in remote rural areas. Up to two thousand members, it operates in outlying provinces...particularly in pockets along the Thailand border."* (Global Terrorism 1996 Report, U.S. State Department)

**5. Holidays and Festivals** (The following material, adapted from Holidays, Festivals and Celebrations of the World Dictionary, compiled by Sue Thompson and Barbara Carlson, [Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1994], is instructive).

**a. Prachum-Ben** (PRAH-choom-buhn, August-September)

- Fifteen-day period dedicated to rituals for the dead.
- Yama, the Hindu God of the Underworld, lets the souls of the dead visit their families.
- Food offerings are set out

**b. Festival of the Reversing Current** (Late October or early November)



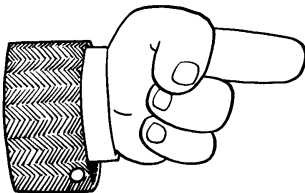
- Celebrates the reversal of tides in Tonle Sap (TOHN-lay-sahp), a lake connected to the Mekong River.
- Time of fireworks, merrymaking, and races of *pirogues* (PEE-ruhngs), or long canoes, at Phnom Penh.

**c. Waso** (June/July-Sep/Oct)

- Buddhist Rains Retreat, where monks remain in their monasteries for meditation during the rainy season.

**d. Other Cambodian holidays:**

- (1) Buddhist New Year (April)
- (2) Chinese New Year (February) Tet
- (3) Liberation Day (7 January) Commemorates the 1979 Vietnamese overthrow of the Khmer Rouge
- (4) Revolution Day (17 April) Remembers the fall of the Lon Nol (LUHN-nahl) Administrations in 1975
- (5) Front Day (2 December) Anniversary of the founding of the Front of National Reconstruction in 1978
- (6) Anniversary of the 1979 Friendship Treaty with Vietnam (18 Feb)
- (7) Genocide Day (9 May) Remembers victims of the Khmer Rouge regime



(8) Chrat Prea Angkal (May) Plowing of the Holy Furrow--ceremonial beginning of the rice planting season

(9) Anniversary of the founding of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cambodia in 1951 (19 Jun)

(10) Anniversary of the founding of the People's Revolutionary Party of Cambodia in 1951 (28 Jun)

## 6. Customs

### a. Gestures

- **Handshakes** Expect few handshakes, especially from women
- **Buddhism** Avoid pointing with the feet, touching someone on the head, raising your voice to attract attention
- **Friendliness** Open interactions, with good eye contact and a smile, are valued

**b. Disabilities** *"The Government does not mandate accessibility for people with disabilities to buildings or government services. According to international human rights groups, 1 in 236 Cambodians is missing at least one limb. This figure reflects the continuing effects of land mines on the population.*



*Programs administered by various NGO's have brought about dramatic improvements in the treatment and rehabilitation of amputees. However, they face considerable societal discrimination, particularly in obtaining skilled employment." (Human Rights Report...)*

**c. National/racial/ethnic minorities** *"Citizens of Vietnamese and Chinese ethnicity have long comprised the largest ethnic minorities. Ethnic Chinese are well accepted. However, fear and animosity continue toward ethnic Vietnamese people, who are seen as a threat to the Cambodian nation and culture.*

*The rights of minorities under the nationality law passed in August are not explicit; constitutional protections are extended only to 'Khmer People,' that is, Cambodians.*

*There were reports that Vietnamese nationals were singled out for harassment at illegal government security force checkpoints.*

*The Khmer Rouge continued a calculated campaign of inflammatory propaganda directed against ethnic Vietnamese, and there were reports that 25 citizens of Vietnam were killed as part of a Khmer Rouge ethnic cleansing campaign in August."*

**d. Freedom of religion** *"The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religion. The Government respects this right in practice. Buddhism is the state religion. The Khmer Rouge have traditionally banned or discouraged religion."*



**7. Cultural Literacy Concepts/Terms** The following terms, adapted from The Dictionary of Global Culture, (edited by Kwame Appiah and Henry Gates, Jr., NY: Alfred Knopf, 1997), apply to Cambodia. Consult this helpful dictionary for further information.

**a. Angkor era** (AHN-kohr)

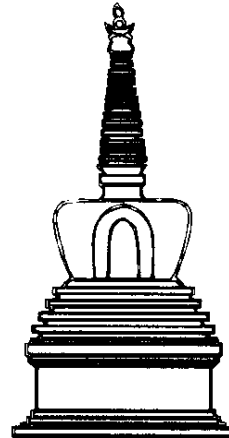
- Khmer period (ninth - fifteenth centuries) remembered as the Golden Age of Cambodia.
- Strongly influenced by Hinduism, recognizing the king as divine.
- Peace allowed for construction of numerous temples, irrigation canals, and emperor tombs.

### **b. Bakong (BAH-kohng)**

- Pyramid shaped temple built by Khmer King Indravarman I in 881. Served as his tomb.
- The first temple made of stone rather than brick and shaped in a perfect pyramid.

### **c. Cambodian art and architecture**

- Reached peak during the period of the Khmer Empire.
- Architecture encompasses art. Indian influences seen in buildings fashioned after Hindu Mt. Meru, the center of the universe located beyond the Himalayas
- Wall carvings, motifs, and patterns depicting mostly Hindu and Khmer history.



- Most well-known structure is the Temple of Angkor Wat.
- Built by Suryavarman II and completed in 1150
- Sandstone work surrounded by a moat 2.5 miles long and 650 feet wide.

### **d. Chbap**

- "Rules" a form of Khmer literature consisting of short poems with puns and a moral ending.
- Written by Buddhist monks from the fourteenth-seventeenth centuries to teach children proper behavior.

### **e. Hari-Hara**

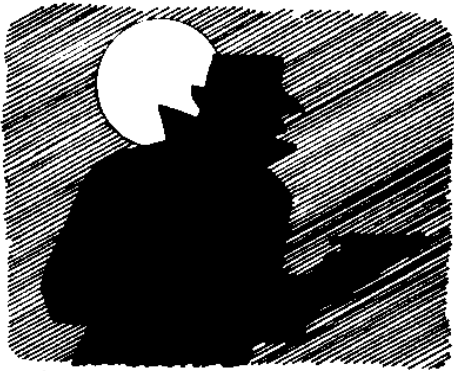
- Khmer divine entity whose name means "grower-remover."
- Hari-Hara is compilation of the gods Vishnu and Shiva, representing good and evil, life and death.



**f. Khmer Rouge** (kah-MAY ROOZH--Khmer is the Cambodian ethnic group, Rouge is French for red.)

- Communist party in Cambodia.
- Strongly opposed the 1970 coup which ousted Prince Sihanouk; rather than supporting the Prince they revolted for control themselves.

- Captured the capital city, Phnom Penh, in 1975 (Kampuchea).
- Pol Pot began genocidal policy eliminating all factions of intellectual, religious, and minority groups



- Before Pol Pot was removed in 1979 by the Vietnamese, approximately 3 million people had been killed.
- Khmer Rouge remain to fight against the Vietnamese and continue guerrilla warfare tactics today against the present Cambodian government. United Nations forces presently assist Cambodia.

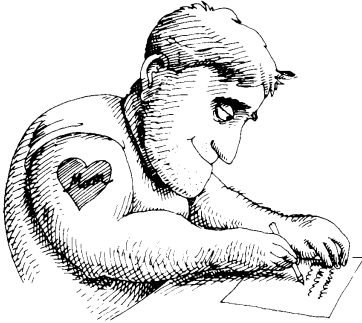
**g. Ream Ker** (REEM-kay)

- 17th century epic poem meaning "the Glory of Rama."
- Khmer poets modeled their epic after the Indian Ramayana
- The Ream Ker alters Hindu thought to represent the Buddhist Khmer and balance of good and evil in the world.

**h. Sihanouk, Prince Norodom** (SEE-ah-nook nohr-OH-dahm, 1922- )

- Appointed king of Cambodia in 1941
- In 1955, Sihanouk ousted the French forming the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community).
- Attempted to keep peace in Cambodia and stated a position of neutrality during the Vietnam War.

- After elections in 1993, crowned king of the constitutional monarchy in the U.N. protectorate of Cambodia. Currently resides in exile in Beijing.



## 8. Resources for Further Study

### a. Cross-cultural resources

Robinson, Daniel and Tony Wheeler. Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit--Cambodia. Berkeley, Calif.: Lonely Planet, 1992. AISO--915.96 R659

The best series, by far, of readily accessible travel guides. Don't leave for Cambodia without this text.

### b. Biography, novels, literature, poetry

Armstrong, John P. Sihanouk Speaks. New York: Walker, [1964].

► Bosun Library: General DS554.8 .A82

Biography of the statesmanship of the "playboy prince." Interviews with Sihanouk himself aided in the writing.

Briggs, Lawrence Palmer. The Ancient Khmer Empire. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1951.

► Bosun Library: FOLIO DS557.B265 B8 OVERSIZE

Covers every period of Khmer rule with photos, charts, and an easy-to-read historical fact format.

Chandler, David P. Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

► Bosun Library: General CT16.0398 C32 1992

Covers Pol Pot as a young Khmer, his introduction to Communism, growth of the Red Khmer, fall from power, and his later years.

Chula, Prince. Lords of Life: The Paternal Monarchy of Bangkok, 1782-1932, with the Earlier and More Recent History of Thailand. Taplinger Publishing Co., 1960.

► Bosun Library: General DS578.C5

Fiffer, Sharon Sloan. Imagining America: Paul Thai's Journey from the Killing Fields of Cambodia to Freedom in the USA.

New York: Paragon House, 1991.

► Chamberlin Library: 959.604 FIFFER

Biography of a boy's life in Cambodia before and after the Khmer Rouge. Paul Thai's journey to the United States with his family and the subsequent challenges of being a refugee and immigrant.

Martin, Marie Alexandrine. Cambodia: a Shattered Society.

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

► Aiso Library: General GEN 959.604 M382 1994.

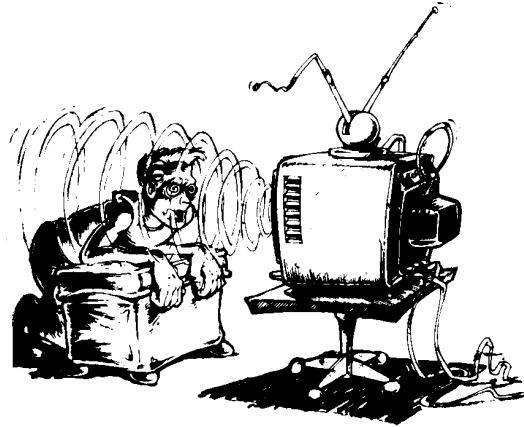
Written by an ethnobotanist working in Cambodia both before and after the war. Martin covers the peace of Cambodia through discussing culture and tradition. She then moves to the causes of war, its effect on the people, and its aftermath. An emphasis on the Khmer people and culture pervades the entire work.

Ngor, Haing A. A Cambodian Odyssey. New York: Macmillan, 1987.

► Chamberlin Library: 959.604 NGOR 1987

Written by an Academy Award winner for his portrayal of a Cambodian reporter in *The Killing Fields*. "I have been many things in life: A trader walking barefoot on paths through the jungles. A medical doctor, driving to his clinic in a shiny Mercedes. In the past few years, to the surprise of many people, I have been a Hollywood actor. But nothing has shaped my life as much as surviving the Pol Pot regime. I am a survivor of the Cambodian holocaust. That's who I am."

c. News articles



"Cambodia's Bureaucracy of Death: Reams of Evidence in Search of a Trial." New York Times, 20 Jul 1997.

*"There were still bloodstains on the floors of the Tuol Sleng torture chamber when a handful of scholars discovered in its back rooms a huge, meticulously kept archive of what has come to be known as Cambodia's 'bureaucracy of death.'"*

Becher, Elizabeth. "On Its Last Legs, the Saddest Cambodian Army." New York Times, 20 Oct 1997, p. A4.

Confusion in the ranks of Cambodia's royalist army. Nhek Bun Chhay, once deputy chief, presently leads 300 troops in a burnt-out town near the Thai border. He says the Khmer Rouge have broken with their former mass murder ways.

Crossette, Barbara. "An Ancient Silk Trade Is Reborn." New York Times, 20 Apr 1997. p. 10.

Account of the revival of the traditional Cambodian silk weaving industry.

Crossette, Barbara. "How the War Goes On (And On) in Cambodia." New York Times, 1997.

Crossette, Barbara. "In Cambodia, a Middle-Classless Society." New York Times, 3 Aug 1997, p. 14.

*"Pol Pot led the Khmer Rouge campaign against Cambodia's middle class...For the Khmer Rouge--a radical Communist movement that glorified peasant life (though its leaders were Paris-educated intellectuals) and believed that Cambodian society could be purified and recreated only by eliminating those who enjoyed material comfort or official power--the policy was all too successful. For Cambodia, however, the loss was inestimable."*

Crossette, Barbara. "World Justice System Lacks Means to Try Pol Pot." New York Times, 21 Jun 1997.

Goodman, Walter. "Cambodians Were Crying 'Crush!'" New York Times, 17 Aug 1997, p. 27.

Account of Cambodians reacting to the jungle trial of Pol Pot.

Kiernan, Ben. "Pol Pot's Brothers in Crime." New York Times, 20 Jun 1997.

Editorial asking "Will the Khmer Rouge get away with genocide?"

Kristof, Nicholas D. "For Third World, Water Is Still a Deadly Drink." New York Times, 9 Jan 1997, p. A1.

Descriptions of illnesses brought on by filthy water.  
"Toilets cluster along the Mekong River in Phnom Penh, Cambodia..."

Mydans, Seth. "Cambodia Poses quandary for World Diplomats." New York Times, 12 Jul 1997.

How to assist the Cambodians in the face of the ouster of Prince Norodom Ranariddh by Hun Sen, who now desires foreign aid.

Mydans, Seth. "Coups Halts Lifeline to Cambodia Poor." New York Times, 20 Jun 1997.

Without foreign aid, families like that of Cheoun Pheap suffer.

Mydans, Seth. "Faces From Beyond the Grave." The New York Times Book Review, 25 May 1997, p. 21.

Book Review, with pictures, of The Killing Fields, edited by Chris Riley and Douglas Niven. *"Before the Khmer Rouge killed thousands of Cambodians, they took their photographs...Of more than 14,000 imprisoned at the Tuol Sleng prison in Phnom Penh between 1975 and 1979, virtually all were killed."*

Mydans, Seth. "In His Prison Hut, Pol Pot Is Feeling 'a Little Bit Bored.'" New York Times, 24 Oct 1997, p. A7.

Account of an interview with 72-year-old Pol Pot, his first interview in 20 years. "The interview came at a time of renewed suffering in Cambodia, where Pol Pot's legacy of violence, political chaos and shattered lives continues..."

Mydans, Seth. "Official Says Pol Pot's Foes, Fearing Trial, May Kill Him." New York Times, 24 Jun 1997.

Mydans, Seth. "Sihanouk Leaves Cambodia After Mediation Bid Fails." New York Times, 27 Oct 1997, p. A9.

Account of 75-year-old King Norodom Sihanouk leaving his home for China after failing to mediate conflicts.

*"The King had spent two months in his country's ancient capital at Siem Reap, meditating and saying Buddhist prayers, on a visit from Beijing, where he makes his home and receives medical care."*

Mydans, Seth. "The Khmer Rouge Implosion." New York Times, 16 Jun 1997.

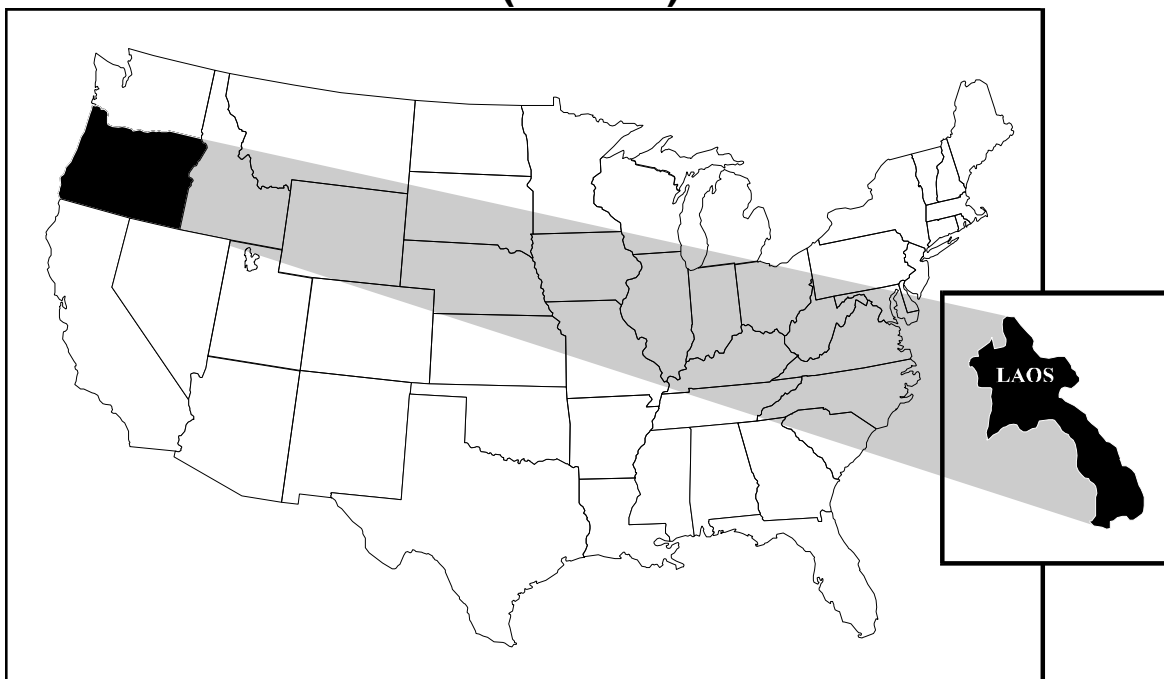
Excellent analysis of current conditions in Cambodia.

Mydans, Seth. "Upheaval Makes Cambodia's Vietnamese Uneasy." New York Times, 2 Aug 1997, p. A8.

"Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia fear that they will be used as scapegoats during the country's upheaval, as has happened in the past."

Reif, Rita. "Restoring a Fine Khmer Craft Rent by Revolution." New York Times, 22 Jun 1997, p. 34.

## Laos (LAH-oh)



<u>Population</u>	4,837,237
% under 15 years	45%
<u>Commo</u>	
TV	no figure
Radio	1:11
Phone	no figure
Newspaper	no figure
<u>Health</u>	
Life Expectancy	Male 51/Female 54
Hospitals	1:402
Doctors	1:3,555
IMR	99:1,000
<u>Income</u>	\$900.00 per cap
<u>Literacy Rate</u>	84%

## 1. Religious Groups

### a. Buddhist 60%

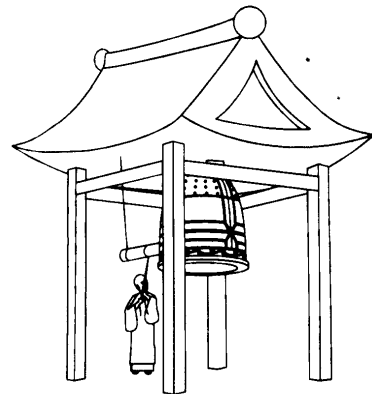
**(1) Background** *"Buddhism was the state religion of the Kingdom of Laos, and the organization of the Buddhist community of monks and novices, the clergy (sangha), paralleled the political hierarchy. The faith was introduced beginning in the eighth century by Mon Buddhist monks and was widespread by the fourteenth century. A number of Laotian kings were important patrons of Buddhism. Virtually all lowland Lao were Buddhists in the early 1990s, as well as some Lao Theung who have assimilated to lowland culture.*

*Since 1975 the communist government has not opposed Buddhism but rather has attempted to manipulate it to support political goals, and with some success. Increased prosperity and a relaxation of political control stimulated a revival of popular Buddhist practices in the early 1990s."*

(Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are from the Library of Congress Country Studies/Area Handbooks--Laos)

**(2) Wat** (waht) *"For the Lao Loum, the wat (Buddhist church/temple/monastery) is one of the two focal points of village life (the other is the school).*

*The wat provides a symbol of village identity as well as a location for ceremonies and festivals. Prior to the establishment of secular schools, village boys received basic education from monks at the wat. Nearly every lowland village has a wat, and some have two.*



*Minimally, a wat must have a residence building for the monks and novices (vihan), and a main building housing the Buddha statues (sim), which is used for secular village meetings as well as for prayer sessions. Depending on the*



wealth and contributions of the villagers, the buildings vary from simple wood and bamboo structures to large, ornate brick and concrete edifices decorated with colorful murals and tile roofs shaped to mimic the curve of the naga, the mythical snake or water dragon. An administrative committee made up of respected older men manages the financial and organizational affairs of the wat."

**(3) Life cycle events** "Buddhist ceremonies generally do not mark events in a life cycle, with the exception of death. Funerals may be quite elaborate if the family can afford it but are rather simple in rural settings. The body lies in a coffin at home for several days, during which monks pray, and a continual stream of visitors pay their respects to the family and share food and drink. After this period, the body is taken in the coffin to a cremation ground and burned, again attended by monks. The ashes are then interred in a small shrine on the wat grounds."

**(4) Buddhism under communism** "The Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) government's successful efforts to consolidate its authority also continues to influence Buddhism.



In political seminars at all levels, the government taught that Marxism and Buddhism were basically compatible because both disciplines stated that all men are equal, and both aimed to end suffering. Political seminars further discouraged 'wasteful' expenditures on religious activities of all kinds, because some monks were sent to political reeducation centers and others were forbidden to preach.

The renunciation of private property by the monks was seen as approaching the ideal of a future communist society. However, Buddhist principles of detachment and nonmaterialism are clearly at odds with the Marxist doctrine of economic development, and popular expenditures on religious donations for merit making are also seen as depriving the state of resources. Thus, although overtly espousing tolerance of

*Buddhism, the state undercut the authority and moral standing of the sangha by compelling monks to spread party propaganda and by keeping local monks from their traditional participation in most village decisions and activities.*

*During this period of political consolidation, many monks left the sangha or fled to Thailand. Other pro-Pathet Lao monks joined the newly formed Lao United Buddhists Association, which replaced the former religious hierarchy. The numbers of men and boys being ordained declined abruptly, and many wat fell empty.*

*Participation at weekly and monthly religious ceremonies also dropped off as villagers under the watchful eye of local political cadre were fearful of any behavior not specifically encouraged.*

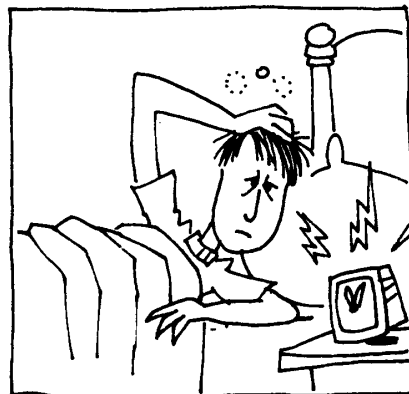
*The [low point] of Buddhism in Laos occurred around 1979, after which a strategic liberalization of policy occurred. Since that time, the number of monks has gradually increased, although as of 1993, the main concentrations continue to be in Vientiane (vee-uhng-JAHN) and other Mekong (MAY-khong) Valley cities.*

*Party officials are allowed to participate at Buddhist ceremonies and even to be ordained as monks to earn religious merit following the death of close relatives. The level of religious understanding and orthodoxy of the sangha, however, is no higher than it had been before 1975, when it was justly criticized by many as backward and unobservant of the precepts."*

## **b. Indigeneous belief (40%)**

**(1) Spirit world** "The belief in phi (pee, spirits) colors the relationships of many Lao with nature and community and provides one explanation for illness and disease.

Belief in phi is blended with Buddhism, particularly at the village level, and some monks are respected as having particular abilities to exorcise malevolent spirits from a sick person or to keep them out of a house. Many wat have a small spirit hut built in one corner of the grounds that is associated with the phi khoun wat, the beneficent spirit of the monastery.



Many Lao believe that the khwan (kwahn) of persons who die by accident, violence, or in childbirth are not reincarnated, becoming instead phi phetu (malevolent spirits). [Indigenous] believers also fear wild spirits of the forests.

Other spirits associated with specific places such as the household, the river, or a grove of trees are neither inherently benevolent nor evil. However, occasional offerings ensure their favor and assistance in human affairs. In the past, it was common to perform similar rituals before the beginning of the farming season to ensure the favor of the spirit of the rice. These ceremonies, beginning in the late 1960s, were discouraged by the government as successive areas began to be liberated. This practice had apparently died out by the mid1980s , at least in the extended area around Vientiane.

Ceremonies oriented to the phi commonly involve an offering of a chicken and rice liquor. Once the phi have taken the spiritual essence of the offering, people may consume the earthly remains. The head of a household or the individual who wants to gain the favor of the spirit usually performs the ritual.



In many villages, a person, usually an older man believed to have special knowledge of the phi, may be asked to choose an auspicious day for weddings or other important events, or for household rites. Each lowland village believes itself protected by the phi ban, which requires an annual offering to ensure the continued prosperity of the village. The village spirit specialist presides over this major ritual, which in the past often involved the sacrifice of a water buffalo and is still an occasion for closing the village to any outsiders for a day. To liang phi ban (feed the village spirit) also serves an important social function by reaffirming the village boundaries and the shared interests of all villagers."

**(2) Shamans** "According to Hmong belief, spirits reside in the sky, and the shaman can climb a ladder to the heavens on his magical horse and contact the spirits there. Sometimes illness is caused by one's soul climbing the steps to the sky, and the shaman must climb after it, locate it, and bring it back to the body in order to effect a cure. During the ritual, the shaman sits in front of the altar astride a wooden bench, which becomes his or her horse. A black cloth headpiece covers vision of the present world, and as the shaman chants and enters a trance, he or she begins to shake and may stand on the bench or move, mimicking the process of climbing to heaven. The chant evokes the shaman's search and the negotiations with the heavenly spirits for a cure or for information about the family's fortune.



Hmong shamans are believed to be chosen by the spirits, usually after a serious or prolonged illness. The illness

would be diagnosed by another shaman as an initiatory illness and confrontation with death, which was caused by the spirits. Both men and women can be summoned in this way by the spirits to be shamans. After recovery from the illness, the newly-called shaman begins a period of study with a master shaman, which may last two or three years, during which time he or she learns the chants, techniques, and procedures of shamanic rites, as well as the names and natures of all the spirits that can bring fortune or suffering to people. Because the tradition is passed orally, there is no uniform technique or ritual; rather, it varies within a general framework according to the practice of each master and apprentice."

## 2. Ethnic/Racial Groups

**a. Lao Loum** (LAHOU loom, lowland--68%) "The Lao Loum comprise several ethnic groups that began to move from the north into the Southeast Asian peninsula about 1,000 years ago. All Lao Loum speak languages of the Tai-Kadai family--for example Lao, Lue, Tai Dam (Black Tai), and Tai Deng (Red Tai). Lao Loum prefer to live in lowland valley areas and base agricultural production on paddy rice."

**b. Lao Theung** (LAHOU tuhng, midland--22%) "The Lao Theung are of Austroasiatic origin and are probably the [indigenous] inhabitants of Laos, having migrated northward in prehistoric times. Originally paddy rice farmers, they were displaced into the uplands by the migrations of the Lao Loum."

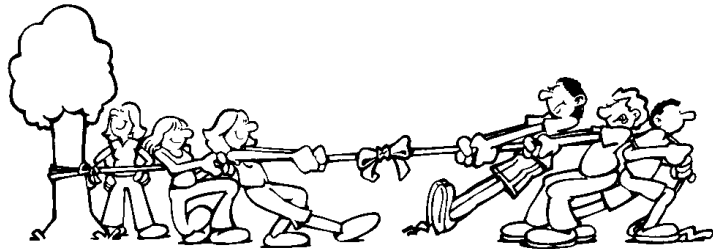


**c. Lao Soung** (LAHOU soong, highland) including the Hmong and Yao (9%) "These groups are Miao-Yao or Tibeto-Burmese speaking peoples who have continued to migrate into Laos from the north within the last two centuries. In Laos most highland groups live on the tops or upper slopes of the northern mountains, where they grow rice and corn in swidden fields."

Some of these villages have been resettled in lowland sites since the 1970s. The Hmong are the most numerous Lao Sung group, with villages spread across the uplands of all the northern provinces. Mien (Yao), Akha, Lahu, and other related groups are considerably smaller in numbers and tend to be located in rather limited areas of the north.

Government policy emphasizes the multiethnic nature of the nation and in many ways works to reduce the discrimination against midland and upland minorities by some lowland Lao. Use of the three general ethnic group classifications emphasizes the commonality of Lao nationality but obscures significant differences among the smaller groups. Most Laotians categorize ethnic groups in terms of these three broad categories, and villagers themselves, when asked their ethnicity by outsiders, are likely to respond Lao Loum, Lao Theung, or Lao Sung, rather than their specific ethnicity."

### 3. Gender Issues



**a. Domestic violence** "There are reports that domestic violence against women occurs, although it is not widespread. Sexual harassment and rape are reportedly rare. In cases of rape that are tried in court, defendants are generally convicted." (Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are from Human Rights Practices for 1996--Laos, U.S. Department of State)

**b. Prostitution** "The Government relies on the Women's Union, a party-sanctioned organization, and youth organizations to educate girls and young women about the schemes of recruiters for brothels and sweatshops in Thailand and elsewhere.



*In the past, the Government has prosecuted some persons for involvement in such recruiting activities. During the year, law enforcement agencies conducted several raids of entertainment establishments accused of fostering prostitution."*

**c. Equality** *"The Constitution provides for equal rights for women, and the Lao Women's Union operates nationally to promote the position of women in Lao society. However, traditional culturally based discrimination persists, especially among lowland Lao and some hill tribes. Many women occupy responsible positions in the civil service and private business, and in urban areas their incomes are often higher than those of men."*

#### **4. Conflicts** Border disputes with Thailand

**5. Holidays and Festivals** (The following material, adapted from Holidays, Festivals and Celebrations of the World Dictionary, compiled by Sue Thompson and Barbara Carlson, [Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1994], is instructive.)



**a. Boun Phan Vet** (boon-PAHN-vet, 12th month of the lunar calendar)

- In capital of Vientiane, national rites are held in That Luang, the temple where the Buddha's relics have traditionally been housed.
- Outside the capital, celebrated to honor Prince Vessantara, an earlier incarnation of the Buddha.
- Dramatic performances, love song contests, cockfights, banquets, and other social gatherings at which the villagers entertain neighbors.

- Also the time for young men to be ordained into the *sangha* or Buddhist monkhood.

**b. Boun Bang Fai** (boon-bahng-FI, full moon day of Vaisakha)

- Rain ceremony during Buddhist Vesak (VAY-sahk) or Vaisakha Puja
- Bun Bang Fai, or rocket festival, predates Buddhism and is intended to insure good crops.
- One of the country's wildest celebrations, with music and irreverent dances, processions and merrymaking.

**c. Boun Makha Bouxa** (boon-mah-kah boo-SAH, February)

- Important Buddhist holy day celebrated in India, and in Laos.
- Commemorates the occasion when 1,250 followers ordained by the Buddha arrived by coincidence at Veluvan Monastery in Rajagriha, India.
- Sermons in the temples throughout the day, and monks spend the day chanting
- People perform acts of merit-making, such as offering food to monks and freeing captive birds and fish.
- Monks lead followers in walking three times around the chapels of monasteries. Each person carries flowers, glowing incense, and a lighted candle in homage to Buddha.

**d. Boun Khao Vatsa** (BOON-kow VAHT-sah, September-October)

- Marks end of Buddhist Lent and beginning of *Kathin* pilgrimage season
- Also called Thadingyut (tah-DING-ye-uhp) or the Festival of the Waters, a popular time for pirogue or canoe races





**e. Vatsa** (VAHT-sah, June/July-September/October)

- Buddhist Rain Retreat, a three-month period when monks remain in monasteries to study and meditate
- Once completed, a month of celebration (known as *Kathin*) sees lay people presenting monks with new robes and other items

**f. Other Laotian holidays**

(1) Ho Khao Padap Dinh, Feast of the Dead (hawh-kow DAHP-DEEN, Aug/Sep; 9th lunar month)

(2) Labor Day (1 May)

(3) National Day (2 December)

(4) New Year's Day (1 January)

(5) Pi Mai, the Lao New Year (bee-MY, usually in May; by Lunar Calendar)

**6. Customs**

**a. Gestures**

- **Touch** Avoid touching another's head or pointing with the foot. Women cannot touch Buddhist monks.
- **Outward Affection** Avoid public displays of affection.
- **Shoes** Removing shoes when entering a temple or home.

**b. Freedom of religion** *"The Constitution contains provisions for religious freedom. In practice, the Government continues to restrict freedom of religion, especially for some Christian denominations.*



*Links with co-religionists and religious associations in other countries require government approval. Although the Government permits foreign nongovernmental organizations with religious affiliations to work in the country, it prohibits foreigners from proselytizing. The Government also restricts the import of foreign religious publications and artifacts.*

*The enforcement of these regulations varies by province. For example, the Catholic Church is unable to operate in the highlands and much of the north, but Catholics can openly attend churches and chapels in central and southern Laos. Several Protestant denominations operate more than 100 churches throughout the country.*

*There continued to be credible reports that local authorities detained some clergy for allegedly criticizing other religions and harassed, arrested, and jailed other religiously active clergy. The persistence of such reports underscores the continuing suspicion on the part of authorities toward some parts of the Lao Christian community. There were also unconfirmed reports that Lao Christians were sometimes barred from the Party or from government employment and that some rural Lao were not allowed to convert to the Baha'i faith.*

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*By comparison, the Government openly encourages Buddhism and supports Buddhist organizations. High-ranking government officials routinely attend religious functions, and Buddhist clergy are prominently featured at important state and party functions. The Government permits Buddhist festivals without hindrance.*

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*Two mosques and a Baha'i center operate openly in Vientiane."*



### **c. People with disabilities**

*"With donor assistance, the Government is implementing limited programs for the disabled, especially amputees. The law does not mandate accessibility to buildings or government services for disabled persons."*

**d. National/racial/ethnic minorities** *"The Constitution provides for equal rights for all minorities, and there is no legal discrimination against them. However, societal discrimination persists.*

*While the Government encourages the preservation of minority cultures and traditions, minority tribes have little voice in government decisions affecting their lands and the allocation of natural resources. Hill tribe interaction with the Government is limited by poor transportation and communication links and a shortage of government resources.*

*The **Hmong** (mohng) are one of the largest and most prominent highland minority groups. They split along clan lines during the U.S. war with Vietnam; many were strongly anti-Communist while others sided with the Lao and Vietnamese Communists. The Government repressed many who had fought against it, especially those still perceived to be resisting its authority.*

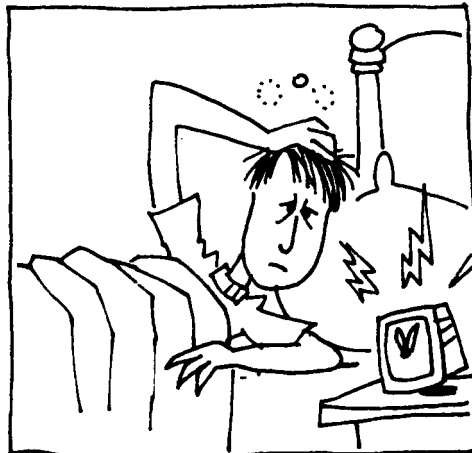
*In recent years, the Government has initiated projects designed to integrate the Hmong into the general society, and an increasing number of those who fled the country after 1975 have repatriated to Laos without suffering persecution. Two U.N. observers who monitored repatriation efforts reported no incidents of abuse or discrimination during the year."*



## 7. Resources for Further Study

Cummings, Joe. Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit--Laos.  
Berkeley, Calif.: Lonely Planet, 1994.

The best series, by far, of readily accessible travel guides. Don't leave for Laos without this text.



"Get involved."

## Vocabulary List--Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos

**Anade** Rather than suffer a direct affront or embarrassment, Burmese prefer to withdraw or avoid a situation entirely. Rather than cause such a feeling in another, a Burman may completely avoid an encounter. Among good friends or family, expected behavior is that a person will never bring up matters that would bring shame or reduction of status to another.

**Angkor Wat** (AHN-kohr waht) Cambodian temple structure. Built by Suryavarman II and completed in 1150, the sandstone work is surrounded by a moat 2.5 miles long and 650 feet wide.

**Aung San Suu Kyi** Key opposition leader to Burmese military rule. Awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Held under house arrest from 20 Jul 1989 to 10 July 1995.

**Bhikkhu** A fully ordained Cambodian monk

**Bonzes** Cambodian novice monks

**Kachin** Ethnic group located in Northeast Burma, living under a system called Gumm-tsa. A chief owns all the land, his people pay tribute. The Kachin have never been subjugated by any of the local empires. They remain a part of Burma in their independent fashion of constant rebellion and antigovernment politics.

**Karen** Collective of ethnic groups living in southern and eastern parts of Burma. Always pro-British with over 30% converting to Christianity causing a strong distrust between Burmese and Karen. Resisted annexation to Burma and today still protest.

**Khmer Rouge** Communist party in Cambodia. Strongly opposed the 1970 coup which ousted Prince Sihanouk; but rather than supporting the Prince they revolted for control themselves. Captured the capital city, Phnom Penh, in 1975 (Kampuchea). Pol Pot began a genocidal policy eliminating all factions of intellectual, religious, and minority groups. Before Pol Pot was removed in 1979 by the Vietnamese, approximately 3 million people had been killed. Khmer Rouge remain to fight against the Vietnamese and continue guerrilla warfare tactics today.

**Merit** Burmans believe that the best way to ensure a better future life is to give as generously as possible to Buddhism rather than to secular charities or causes. Buddhist giving is noted in golden books kept by heavenly beings.

**Pagan** Ancient Burmese city founded in the mid-ninth century. King Anawrahta expanded the city into an empire by conquering the Mons in southern Burma. Anawrahta introduced Theravada Buddhism while allowing Mon art and architecture to remain. The Pagan era was peaceful and economically powerful.

**Sihanouk, Prince Norodom** (SEE-ah-nook, nohr-OH-dahm, 1922- ) Appointed king of Cambodia in 1941. In 1955, Sihanouk was finally able to oust the French forming the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community). Sihanouk attempted to keep peace in Cambodia. In exile, Sihanouk led the government once again and in 1991 negotiated a treaty to end civil war. After elections in 1993, crowned king of the constitutional monarchy in the U.N. protectorate of Cambodia. Currently resides in exile in Beijing.

**Thant, U** (1909-1974) Third secretary-general of the United Nations from 1962-1972.

**Waso** Festival of Lights. Homes are lit with paper lanterns, all-night weaving contests take place. Young unmarried women weave robes, and at dawn offer them to images of the Buddha at the pagoda. Festival, under different names, is held in many parts of Southeast Asia.

**Wat** (waht) Buddhist church/temple/monastery, one of the two focal points of village life (the other is the school). The wat provides a symbol of village identity as well as a location for ceremonies and festivals. Prior to the establishment of secular schools, village boys received basic education from monks at the wat. Nearly every lowland village has a wat, and some have two.

## Review Quiz: Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos



**Part 1--Multiple Choice** Place the letter of the most correct answer in the blank provided.

1. \_\_\_\_ In most Theravada Buddhist societies, highest respect is paid to
  - a. older women.
  - b. Buddhist monks.
  - c. local police.
2. \_\_\_\_ The Temple of Angkor is located in
  - a. Laos.
  - b. Cambodia.
  - c. Burma.
3. \_\_\_\_ The Burman practice of "anade" sees people in embarrassing or confrontive situations as doing what?
  - a. Pulling out a sword to show authority
  - b. Turning red faced, then smiling
  - c. Withdrawal or avoidance of the situation entirely
4. \_\_\_\_ Another name for a Buddhist temple in Laos is
  - a. church.
  - b. wat.
  - c. stupa.
5. \_\_\_\_ The Khmer Rouge terrorist group is located in which country?
  - a. Cambodia
  - b. Myanmar
  - c. Malaysia



6. \_\_\_\_\_ In traditional Buddhist practice, Buddha is honored because he was
- a. a god.
  - b. an intermediary to God.
  - c. a deeply respected, very wise human being.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ The designated king of Cambodia, currently living in exile in Beijing, is
- a. Norodom Sihanouk.
  - b. Pol Pot.
  - c. U. Thant.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Buddhist thought and practice in Burma/Cambodia/Laos is of what school?
- a. Zen
  - b. Theravada
  - c. Northern
9. \_\_\_\_\_ A major leader of the Khmer Rouge, now elderly and under house arrest, is
- a. Norodom Sihanouk.
  - b. Pol Pot.
  - c. U. Thant.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ The 1991 Burman winner of the Noble Prize, held under house arrest for over five years, is
- a. U. Thant.
  - b. Aung San Suu Kyi.
  - c. Kadim Kyanzittha.

**Part 2--True/False** Place a T or an F in the blank provided.



1. \_\_\_\_\_ During the Waso Buddhist Rains Retreat, monks wander about the countryside asking for alms.

## Unit 12h: Country Area Studies--Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Laos

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2. \_\_\_\_\_ Belief in both a vibrant spirit world and traditional Buddhist practice is found in many Laotian peoples.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Meditation is one way of seeking nirvana in Buddhist practice.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Amputees in Cambodia receive government assistance and legal equality.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Women within Burman and Cambodian society have traditionally enjoyed a high status.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ The current Laotian government openly encourages Buddhism and Buddhist organizations.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Many Burmans feel the best way to ensure a better future life is through giving to Buddhist causes (merit).
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Most Burmans have little to do with psychic or supranormal powers.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ The term "Bonze" describes a fully ordained Cambodian monk.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ The current Laotian government is Communist.



"I truly believe that the ultimate determinant in the struggle that we will face will not be tanks and airplanes, but a test of wills and national character...a trial of spiritual resolve...the values we hold...the beliefs we cherish...the ideals to which we are dedicated."

General Charles C. Krulak